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Progress in the implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States

Report of the Secretary-General

Addendum

National institutions and administrative capacity in small island developing States*

Contents

		Paragraphs	Page
	Introduction	1	3
I.	Progress in strengthening national institutions and administrative capacity	2	3
II.	Major initiatives	3–4	3
	A. At the national level	3	3
	B. At the regional and international levels	4	4
III.	Major problems and constraints	5–6	5
	A. Problems	5	5
	B. Constraints	6	5

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99-01230 (E) 020299

IV. Priorities for future action 7–8 6

A. At the national level 7 6

B. At the regional and international levels 8 6

Introduction

1. National institutions and administrative capacity play an essential role in promoting sustainable development. Recent experience in the implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States[1] (hereinafter referred to as the Programme of Action) attests to the significance of that role. By and large, more progress has been made in those small island developing States with, than in those without, proper institutions in place. Effective institutions and administrative capacity are a prerequisite of sustainable development.

I. Progress in strengthening national institutions and administrative capacity

2. Most small island developing States have realized that their inherent, characteristic disadvantages make it all the more necessary for them to develop effective institutions and administrative capacity in order to meet the multitude of challenges arising from the imperatives of resource conservation and environmental protection. Recent country assessments reveal that since the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States in 1994, a substantial number of small island developing States have taken initiatives aimed at institutional strengthening and administrative capacity-building. These initiatives include the following:

(a) *Establishment of a high-level policy-making or coordinating body*. A considerable number of small island developing States have set up high-level bodies to guide and coordinate sustainable development policies and measures. These bodies often assume the institutional structure of a high-level commission or council headed by the head of Government or a senior minister, with a broad membership of government departments and, in a number of cases, major groups and private sector representatives. While not all such bodies have policy-making mandates, most have advisory and coordination functions among their principal responsibilities. Their establishment and leadership have provided a catalyst for energizing action;

(b) *Establishment of specialized bodies*. Some small island developing States have set up new offices or units within government departments and have entrusted them with responsibilities for specific sectors, such as waste management or fisheries resources. In other small island developing States, existing structures have been upgraded and strengthened in terms of administrative status, manpower and funding. The reinforcement has enabled them to deal with the emerging problems more effectively;

(c) *Enactment of new legislation*. A large number of small island developing States have enacted legislation to chart a new course for economic growth and development while complying with regional and international legal instruments. Such steps are often followed by the formulation of a national strategy addressing different sectors and issues in the broader context of sustainable development. The enactment of new laws and the subsequent promulgation of executive rules and regulations have provided an overall legal and policy framework for strengthening institutions and building administrative capacity;

(d) *Introduction of environmental impact assessment (EIA) and economic instruments*. In some small island developing States, environmental impact assessment (EIA) has been applied to an increasing number of projects, making it an important environmental management tool. In some others, economic instruments such as user fees, deposit refunds and tax incentives have been introduced on a limited scale with a view to promoting behavioural changes in favour of sustainable development practices while at the same time generating revenues to help strengthen institutional and administrative capacity. In such instances, appropriate use of economic instruments is becoming an effective administrative tool for environmental management and resource conservation.

II. Major initiatives

A. At the national level

3. Examples of successful initiatives for strengthening national institutions and administrative capacity include the following:

(a) In the Federated States of Micronesia, a President's Council on Environment and Sustainable Development has been established to coordinate and oversee sustainable development activities of national government departments. In Fiji, a National Environment Strategy has been formulated following a comprehensive review of the status of the environment. This has been followed by the drafting of new comprehensive legislation to give effect to the goals identified in the National Environment Strategy. Within the Government, the status of the Environment Unit has been upgraded to that of a full Department. Similarly,

the Department of Forestry and the Mineral Resources Department have set up their own environmental units staffed by trained environmental officers in the respective sectors. The two departments have also developed environmental policies for their areas of responsibility;

(b) In Barbados, a national commission on sustainable development has been established, with broad representation from various ministries and the involvement of the private sector and major groups. A major responsibility of the commission is to facilitate national level coordination of sustainable development programmes and to promote public awareness. Another significant initiative taken by Barbados is the establishment of a Chemical Substances Technical Working Group on the Management of Hazardous Substance, comprising representatives from relevant agencies including the private sector, the workers' union, and academia. The Working Group has been working on issues of legislation and safety guidelines to cover the imputation, transportation, storage, use and disposal of toxic chemicals and their wastes. The issue of an emergency response protocol has also been under consideration;

(c) In Mauritius, a national environmental commission has been set up, chaired by the Prime Minister, with a broad membership, including ministers responsible for economic planning, finance, education, science and technology, energy and natural resources, tourism, industry, health and justice, and representatives of local government. A key mandate of the commission is to ensure coordination and cooperation among public departments, local authorities and other organizations engaged in environmental protection programmes;

(d) In Cyprus, efforts have been made to use economic instruments as a new tool for reorienting tourism development. Various new tax incentives have been introduced to diversify and upgrade tourism products. Fiscal instruments are used to encourage sound land-use and coastal zone practices. Similar instruments are being applied in other tourism-related sectors so as to improve the overall quality and balance of sustainable tourism.

B. At the regional and international levels

4. The past few years have seen intensified regional and international cooperation in institutional strengthening and capacity-building in small island developing States. Examples of successful initiatives include the following:

(a) The Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) in collaboration with the University of the West Indies (UWI) successfully completed a five-year multisectoral project entitled "IADB/UWI Environmental Monitoring Project"; this largely institutional strengthening and capacity-building project involved the establishment of a permanent environmental database; training in requisite skills; the establishment of baseline water, soil and air data; the development of image analysis maps; and the building of data interpretation capability and sampling criteria;

(b) Through a five-year (1997–2002) grant, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is supporting a project entitled "UNESCO Associated Schools Caribbean Sea project (CSP)", which aims at building capacities in the management of coastal and marine resources; a key objective of the project is capacity-building at the national and regional levels through teacher training, curriculum development, design and production of new teaching materials, environmental education camps and field trips for students aimed at skills development;

(c) The South Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) has coordinated the preparation of national environmental management strategies (NEMS) throughout the region, with assistance from the Asian Development Bank, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and Australia; the process has included a review of relevant legislation, preparation of a state-of-the-environment report, national seminars and the development of a national environmental strategy for each country; through a similar initiative, the South Pacific Commission has facilitated the work of the Pacific Sustainable Development Network, which is designed to strengthen the capacity of institutions in the region and to develop effective and efficient systems for information exchange;

(d) Through its Capacity 21 funds, UNDP has provided assistance to the Programme of Capacity-Building for Sustainable Development in the South Pacific; the programme is geared towards assisting the Pacific small island developing States in strengthening governmental and non-governmental capacity for sustainable development; it aims at fostering the participation of the general public, including women, in development planning and at incorporating land and marine tenure systems as well as management practices in future policies; also utilizing Capacity 21 resources, UNDP has supported two projects in Sao Tome and Principe aimed at establishing intersectoral mechanisms that will facilitate the public and private sectors' participation in the formulation of national sustainable development plans;

(e) Belgium, Sweden and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) have collaborated in providing support to the Regional Coordinating Unit for the Eastern Africa Subregion in an effort to strengthen the capacity of African small island developing States to deal with environmental disasters; the main objective of this project is to upgrade the capacity of small island developing States to respond to environmental disasters including oil spills in the Eastern Africa subregion; the project also deals with management of coastal and marine resources in the subregion.

III. Major problems and constraints

A. Problems

5. While most small island developing States recognize the compelling need to strengthen their institutions and administrative capacity, they have encountered a number of difficulties in their efforts to implement measures to that end. While each country has its unique circumstances, the major problems common to them include the following:

(a) *Inadequate enforcement of legislation*. For those small island developing States that have enacted new legislation, weakness of enforcement has emerged as a major problem; the new laws on resource conservation and environmental protection, essential as they are, take time and substantial resources to enforce; among other things, enforcement requires training of personnel and upgrading of law enforcement structures; there are indications that suggest a weakening, in recent years in several small island developing States, of the commitment to enforce the laws; in some small island developing States, enforcement has become sporadic; individual instances of resistance to enforcement, often associated with economic considerations, have compounded the problems;

(b) *Lack of coordination*. Despite the fact that most newly created high-level bodies in small island developing States are entrusted with the functions of coordination, an abundance of problems remain in this area; by its very nature, coordination is a difficult undertaking and is certainly made more so in small island developing States by the variety of intersectoral issues involved, the different types of interdisciplinary expertise required and the large number of agencies concerned; country assessments suggest that most small island developing States remain at the lower end of the performance curve in the coordination of sustainable development policies and measures;

(c) *Lack of proactive strategy*. Recent experience in small island developing States shows that government action in institutional and capacity-building is often taken in response to emerging needs and/or new regional/international obligations, while emergency responses are necessary, Governments of small island developing States need to adopt a more proactive stance in institutional and administrative capacity-building through a vision of the country's long-run socio-economic development and its institutional and administrative capacity requirements; such a proactive stance is necessary in order for small island developing States to improve planning, and enhance their capacity for tackling future problems;

(d) *Low priority*. A number of small island developing States have not yet accorded high priority to institution- and capacity-building; some of them have had to deal with more pressing problems such as natural disasters and macroeconomic imbalances; the recent economic crisis has had direct impact on some small island developing States where deteriorations in economic performance have further reduced scope for action for institutional and administrative capacity-building;

(e) *Lack of recognition*. Despite the great strides in environmental awareness, the problem of inadequate public recognition of the importance of institutions dealing with resource conservation and environmental protection has impeded progress in strengthening these institutions and their capacity; the lack of public recognition has also affected the effectiveness of the coordination of sustainable development policies and measures, as the coordination mechanisms are not always accorded the authority and recognition due them.

B. Constraints

6. Assessments of country experiences in institutional and administrative capacity-building have highlighted a number of constraints in small island developing States. Those shared by most small island developing States include the following:

(a) *Limited availability of human resources*. The fact that the majority of small island developing States have very small populations seriously restricts their ability to staff specialized resource and environmental management institutions; the brain drain from many small island developing States, and the traditional dependence on expatriates in some small island developing States for specialized expertise, have hindered efforts at institutional and administrative capacity-building; lack of training at an

adequate level has further weakened the local capacity to deal with complex issues;

(b) *Lack of financial resources*. In several small island developing States that have established or upgraded institutions charged with resource conservation and environmental protection, inadequate national budgets have seriously limited the scope of their operations; even in situations where local expertise exists for dealing with environmental protection and resource management problems, shortages of funds hinder adequate action.

IV. Priorities for future action

A. At the national level

7. Priorities for future action at the national level include the following:

(a) Governments of small island developing States should take a proactive stance towards institutional and administrative capacity-building; they should further strengthen their national sustainable development bodies by enhancing their political and legal status, increasing their staffing levels and improving their modalities of operation; those that have not established such bodies should take immediate action to ensure that a national mechanism for guiding and coordinating sustainable development policy is put in place and is given adequate status and resources for effective functioning;

(b) Specialized institutions devoted to specific sectors should be established and provided with adequate staff and budgetary resources for their operations; such institutions are required particularly to deal with major resource conservation issues, such as those involving fisheries, coastal zones and biodiversity;

(c) Governments of small island developing States should ensure that environmental laws and regulations are fully enforced and that national sustainable development strategies are implemented; to that end, monitoring and follow-up activities need to be carried out; particular attention should be paid to the training of civil servants and technical staff in order to enable them to effectively implement the relevant legislation and regulations; in this context, national action should be taken to promote the use of EIAs and economic instruments.

B. At the regional and international levels

8. Priorities for action at the regional and international levels include the following:

(a) Governments of small island developing States should both expand and deepen their regional and subregional cooperation in national institutions and administrative capacity-building, especially in areas where they are lacking in expertise and where joint activities in research and training could help to overcome national resource constraints, facilitate the exchange of national experiences and increase the cost-effectiveness of regional cooperation;

(b) Regional institutions should be provided with adequate resources by member States to carry out research and training activities, undertake critical assessments of priorities and needs, and facilitate the exchange of experience and dissemination of information; regional institutions with the right expertise should assist member countries in the preparation of new legislation, as necessary, and in the formulation and implementation of national strategies;

(c) The international community should provide adequate financial resources to small island developing States so as to enable them to carry out necessary institutional reforms and changes and to improve their national administrative capacity; agencies of the United Nations system and other organizations should increase training activities to help update and improve the skills of staff engaged in sustainable development activities; organizations with the appropriate technical capacity, including funds and programmes and specialized agencies, should also provide technical assistance or advisory services to small island developing States in respect of building up their national institutions;

(d) Bilateral donors should (i) provide financial and technical support to small island developing States to facilitate their ratification and implementation of relevant international instruments; (ii) help provide training opportunities and facilities, including scholarships, particularly in areas where small island developing States suffer from serious lack of local expertise; (iii) support current efforts at building an information network for small island developing States (SIDSNET) so that they may have better access to information on state-of-the-art technology and become active participants in the exchange of experience and dissemination of information; and (iv) provide financial and technical assistance to the regional organizations of

small island developing States to enable them to adequately meet the technical assistance needs of member countries.

Notes

[1] *Report of the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, Bridgetown, Barbados, 25 April–6 May 1994* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.94.I.18 and corrigenda), chap. I, resolution 1, annex II.